

# How do I manage STRESS?



## Why is stress important to talk about?

Feelings of stress are often your body's way of protecting you and letting you know that you are feeling worried. Having a health condition and undergoing treatments might lead to times when you feel stressed or worried.

## How can managing stress help me?

There are lots of things that you can do to help reduce feelings of stress and its' unpleasant symptoms, to help you feel better in your body

and improve your mood. This also enables you to more effectively manage the stress(es) that you are currently experiencing.

## How can you use this toolkit?

This toolkit is designed to provide you with information about what stress may look and feel like, to help you identify if and when you are feeling stressed. It also aims to provide you with some handy tips that you can use to help you reduce feelings of stress. At the end of the toolkit there are also links to further information and support if you wish to explore this area in more detail.



# What is stress?

**Stress is something we can all experience at one time or another in our lives.** There are lots of different things that can cause us to feel stressed and lots of different symptoms to suggest that you may be feeling stressed.

Some examples of causes of stress include:

- coping with illness, e.g. side effects of the condition and/or its treatment and fitting in hospital appointments
- life changes e.g. divorce, retirement, bereavement
- managing work and/or home tasks
- encountering change – this can be anything from moving house, getting married, expecting a baby or being diagnosed with a health condition
- juggling a combination of tasks or demands at the same time
- maybe you can think of some other examples?

## **How can you tell if you are stressed, what are the symptoms?**

Stress can alter the way we feel in our body (physical symptoms), our mood (emotional symptoms), our thoughts (cognitive symptoms) and sometimes things we do (behavioural symptoms).

## **Physical symptoms can include:**

- muscle tension e.g. tightness across your shoulders
- headaches
- feeling lightheaded
- breathlessness
- feeling sweaty
- skin rashes
- digestion difficulties and diarrhoea

## **Emotional symptoms can include:**

- irritability
- frustration
- feeling anxious, worried or 'on edge'
- mood swings or big changes in the way we feel
- feeling low in mood or depressed

## **Cognitive symptoms can include:**

- frequent, racing thoughts e.g. worry about lots of different topics
- difficulty concentrating
- memory difficulties e.g. forgetting things, or word finding difficulties

## **Behavioural symptoms can include:**

- disrupted sleep
- absences from work and/or missed deadlines
- decreased productivity or doing less

# Top tips and strategies

Here are some techniques that you can try to help reduce your stress:

- 1 Is there a pattern to when you are feeling stressed?**  
Identifying a pattern can help you act to reduce stress sooner and lessen its effects. What makes it worse/better?
- 2 Schedule regular breaks** and make sure you keep a balance of leisure and work activities.
- 3 Identify one specific problem at a time to solve** – do this by brainstorming possible solutions, list the pros and cons of each, then pick one option to try out
- 4 Practice relaxation techniques** regularly, such as progressive muscle relaxation or breathing relaxation (see links below).
- 5 Develop a regular routine** and schedule regular **physical activity**, such as a walk to your local park. Most people find that completing regular, gentle physical activity helps them to feel more energetic and improves their sleep. Always consult a healthcare profession before undertaking physical activity to check what is manageable for you.
- 6 Notice when you are thinking negatively and ask yourself about these thoughts;** often we tend to focus on what's not going so well and what we're not achieving, rather than the things that we are doing well. Be aware of challenge unrealistic expectations that you may hold, e.g. ask yourself 'would I expect the same of a loved one or friend in the same situation as me?' – often we tend to be far less critical of others and put greater pressure on ourselves, which may be adding to our stress
- 7 Talk to people** – share your concerns with family/friends/colleagues – they may be able to help you problem solve and often talking about a concern can help us to see it from alternative perspectives, which helps us to challenge negative thoughts (see above bullet point)
- 8 Identify previous strategies that have been helpful** when you or someone you know has been stressed can be useful to generate extra ideas for useful coping techniques.



# WHAT SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE?

Visit the hospital website <http://www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/> and speak to your healthcare team if you wish to access more information. Some teams have a psychologist working within them to help provide information and support on managing stress. The patient information centre in the main hospital building and BHOC entrance also provide leaflets and audio resources for effectively managing stress.

## Links to appropriate resources

1. The hospital website contains written and audio information and tools for managing stress, including:

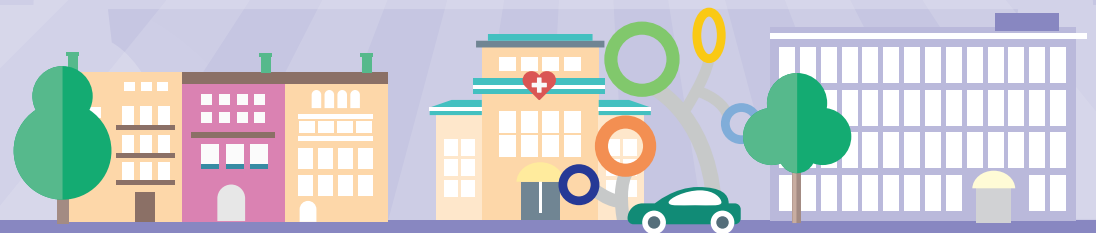
- 'Overcoming stress and anxiety' [http://www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/media/2205201/overcoming\\_stress\\_and\\_anxiety\\_final\\_12\\_pages.pdf](http://www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/media/2205201/overcoming_stress_and_anxiety_final_12_pages.pdf) this is a more detailed booklet which provides more in-depth information and advice on reducing stress and anxiety. Copies are available in the BHOC Information and Support Centre, which include a free relaxation CD
- Guided relaxation audio <http://www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/your-hospitals/bhoc/information-and-support/useful-resources/>

2. The NHS Choices website includes a breathing relaxation script and video: <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/pages/ways-relieve-stress.aspx>.

3. Mind have practical information and links for further support on their website: <http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/relaxation/relaxation-tips/#.V1GI9TUrhE>.

4. Northumberland Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust have created a self-help guide for managing stress, which addresses in more detail signs of, and strategies for managing, stress <https://www.ntw.nhs.uk/resource-library/stress-self-help/>.

5. 'Moodjuice' website and downloadable self-help guides are produced by Choose Life Falkirk and the Adult Clinical Psychology Service, NHS Forth Valley. There are various guides for improving wellbeing, including managing stress: <http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/stress.asp>.



These toolkits have been written by NHS clinical psychologists and neuropsychologists working for University Hospitals Bristol. They have been co-designed with service users and healthcare staff. These toolkits are only intended to provide general advice and information. Please discuss your individual needs with your doctor or specialist nurse. If you would like more information about psychology services please go to:

<http://www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/support-for-patients/psychological-health-services/>

We would like to thank patients and other healthcare staff for their contributions to this toolkit.

For access to other patient toolkits please go to the following address:

<http://www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/support-for-patients/psychological-health-services/resources/>

For this leaflet in large print, audio or PDF format, please email [patientleaflets@uhbristol.nhs.uk](mailto:patientleaflets@uhbristol.nhs.uk)

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